

A Subself Theory of Personality

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Abstract Previous theories of personality have introduced the concepts of ego states, complexes, subsystems, subpersonalities, and subelves. A series of postulates and corollaries are proposed in the present paper that form the skeleton of a formal theory of personality based on the concept of subelves. Structural, developmental, psychopathological, and psychotherapeutic implications are discussed.

Keywords Personality · Subself · Subpersonality

Accordingly it is not surprising that some people have great resistance to seeing their personality as other than one monolithic coherent unit. Something inside them resists the awareness that their personality is made up of many different parts—as if to admit such a breakdown would cause the breaking down into non-being of their identity itself. (Vargiu 1974, p. 53)

Many of the major theorists of personality have proposed that the mind is made up of many subelves. For example, Berne (1961) talked of ego states, Carl Jung (Proff 1973) of complexes, Maslow (1970) of syndromes, and Angyal (1965) of subsystems. A review of these theories and those of others who had proposed similar ideas can be found in Lester (1995).¹ However, despite this agreement on the usefulness of the concept of the subself, very little formal theoretical discussion has appeared using this concept. The present article proposes a series of postulates and corollaries for a formal subself theory of the mind and discusses the relevance of this theory for constructivist psychology.

¹These include scholars such as Horowitz (1988), Mair (1977), Ogilvy (1977), Rowan (1990), Shapiro and Elliott (1976), and Vargiu (1974).

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Is a Multiple Self Universal?

Postulate 1 Not every individual has a multiple self.

Frick (1993) suggested that only neurotics have multiple selves, not mature and integrated people. He proposed that the level of integration parallels the level of self-awareness. Subselves are associated with low or distorted levels of awareness. Despite Frick's negative view of the concept of subselves, his views suggest the proposition that not everyone may have a mind made up of multiple selves. This raises the question, therefore, of what are the differences between those whose mind can be conceptualized as a multiple self and those whose mind can be conceptualized as a unified self, an issue open to empirical investigation in the future.

Executive Control

Postulate 2 At any point in time, one subself is in control of the mind. It may be said to have executive power.

The notion that one subself is in control of the mind at any point in time was proposed by Berne (1961) in his description of ego states. A good analogy here is a computer in which different programs are in operation at each point in time, such as Excel or SPSS or Microsoft Word. For the present theory, the subself that has executive power will be called the "executive subself."

Corollary 2a When one subself has executive power, the other subselves are said to be suspended.

The concept of suspension of systems of constructs, of course, was fully described by Kelly (1955) in his theory of personal constructs. Berne (1961) called this process decommissioning.

Corollary 2b When one subself has executive power, some of the other subselves may be monitoring what is being processed by the executive subself, but others may not. Empirical investigation of the individual is necessary to determine which subselves are monitoring and which are not.

The extreme of this situation is in multiple personality where the different subselves may have amnesia for what transpires when other subselves have executive power. On the other hand, in descriptions of the "hidden observer" in hypnosis (Hilgard 1986), the belief is that one subself monitors what is going on when other subselves have executive power. Bearhs (1983) has called this co-consciousness which he conceptualizes as subselves functioning simultaneously. It is, therefore, possible that some suspended subselves may monitor what transpires in the executive subself while other subselves may not.

Corollary 2c Some subselves collaborate in groups or teams, while others may be isolates; some appear in many situations while others may appear on only rare special occasions; some are domineering while others are submissive.

These dimensions on which subelves may be construed have been suggested by Mair (1977).

Corollary 2d A subelf may have executive power for anywhere from seconds to hours or longer.

In the majority of situations, each subelf has executive power for a reasonable period, perhaps extending for hours. If subelves are associated with roles, a person may teach a class (in a professorial role) for 2 hours and then drive home to a family where he or she switches into a spouse role. On the other hand when people have internal dialogues within themselves, debating whether to take some action, each subelf has executive power for the time it takes to argue one side of the argument. In the extreme, the internal dialogue may become chaotic as in Laing's (1969) analysis of the fragmented speech of a schizophrenic woman who was in psychotherapy with him.

Corollary 2e Selfhood is whichever subelf has executive power at the time.

The issues of who "I" am have long been debated by psychologists interested in the notion of selfhood. In the present theory, selfhood is perceived by the individual to be whichever subelf has executive power at the time.

Corollary 2f Subelves may form coalitions within the larger group. These coalitions may improve or impair the functioning of the mind.

In groups and in families (Cox and Paley 1997) coalitions may form between smaller subsets of the whole, such as children versus the parents in family systems. The same process may occur with subelves. This can be good if the coalitions assist a weak subelf to assert itself, but bad if a group of subelves forces other subelves into submission.

Corollary 2g The existence of subelves accounts for the occasional inconsistency in the behavior of individuals.

Mischel (1968) argued that the occasional inconsistency of behavior provided strong support for a contextual or situational theory of human behavior (as opposed to intrapsychic explanations). The existence of subelves weakens Mischel's arguments by viewing the apparent inconsistencies as the result of different subelves having executive power in the different situations.

Subelves as a Small Group

Postulate 3 The subelves function in a manner similar to a small group of individuals.

Lester (1993–1994) suggested the usefulness of viewing the various subelves in the mind as a small group. In group dynamics research, intragroup conflict is typically seen as counter-productive, expending energy on activities unrelated to the group

purpose. Vargiu (1974) has noted that achieving harmony and resolving conflict may also require the various subselves to change, and this requires effort.

Shapiro and Elliott (1976) demonstrated the usefulness in psychotherapy of creating new subselves in clients designed to reduce this intragroup conflict. For example, it is useful to have a subself with the function of “recording secretary” for information storage, another with the function of “mediator” and sometimes a “chairman of the board” with the power to help resolve conflict between the subselves. In addition, occasional subselves may outlive their use and should be encouraged to “retire” or no longer try to influence the individual’s mind.

Lester noted that small groups with a hierarchical structure are often more productive, but their members are less satisfied. On the other hand, some structure is often useful. The goal is perhaps to have a dominant subself, but not one that is overly dominating.

Lester noted that research on group dynamics indicates that increasing the size of the group eventually increases the chances that a dominant member will emerge and force conformity from the other group members. Thus, there is a limit to the size of a group for effective functioning. In writing on subselves, Rowan (1990), and Shapiro and Elliott (1976) have suggested that from four to ten subselves is ideal.

Two empirical studies have been reported on this issue. Rowan (1990) asked the clients in a group he led to list their subselves. The mean was 6.5 with a range of zero to eighteen. Lester (1992) asked a sample of undergraduate students to list their subselves and found a mean of 3.5 with a range of two to six. The number of subselves reported in Lester’s study was not associated with age, but the women reported more subselves than the men (with means of 3.8 versus 2.5). The number of subselves reported was also associated with neuroticism and extraversion scores. The extraverted neurotics reported the most subselves, with a mean of 4.6. In another study, students who were unable to report subselves scored lower on a test of self-monitoring (Lester 1997).

Research on group dynamics also indicates that egalitarian small groups typically produce more and better solutions to problems than individuals, but that they take longer to reach decision and are more likely to make risky decisions. Perhaps these same principles might apply to people with many subselves. For example, it has been proposed by Angyal (1965), Berne (1961) and Jung (Proffoff 1973) that subselves that are excluded from ever assuming control of the mind exert pressure on the dominant (and domineering) subself, often intruding upon (and even invading) the dominant subself, leading to psychological disturbance.

These ideas can be summarized in several corollaries.

Corollary 3a In some productive organizations of subselves, one subself acts as a leader, analogous to the conductor of an orchestra, coordinating the contributions of the other subselves.

Corollary 3b Egalitarian groups of subselves typically result in greater satisfaction for the individual.

Corollary 3c The individual’s subselves can reorganize themselves in new ways as they develop.

Corollary 3d Groups of subselves are best limited at least four and no more than ten.

Can a Multiple Self be Healthy?

Postulate 4 Having a unified self or a multiple self has no bearing on the individual's psychological health.

Some theorists (for example, Gergen 1971) propose that greater pluralism is associated with greater psychological well-being, while others (for example, Rogers 1959) propose that greater unity is associated with greater psychological well-being.

Corollary 4a It can be healthy for one subself to maintain overall control of the group of subselves while allowing each subself to have executive power from time to time or delegating duties to other subselves. It may be pathological when this “chairman of the board” is impaired in its role, for this may lead to conflict, struggles and even war between the subselves, rendering the person's mind chaotic.

Conflict between subselves can be avoided by having good communication between them, validating the existence and function of each subself, and by strengthening the “chairman of the board.”

Rationality and Plural Subselves

Postulate 5 Multiple selves may lead to more rational decisions than a unified self.

Moldoveanu and Stevenson (2001) explored the implications of a plural (versus a single) self for the economic theory of humans as rational agents. They portrayed the multiple self as an “ever-changing, possibly internally conflicting entity” (p. 295), and they argued that, “Split-self—or schizoid approaches—recognize the internally incoherent nature of selfhood...” (p. 318). Economic man implies a self-interested, rational and temporally stable individual, and classical economic theory conceptualizes humans as rational decision-makers. The possibility of multiple selves might pose grave problems for classical economic theory.

Lester (2003) responded by noting that not all conceptions of the multiple self would result in irrational decision-making. Indeed, some models, such as that of Shapiro and Elliott (1976) discussed above, in which subselves such as “recording secretary” and “mediator” exist, might lead to greater rationality in decision-making. We have seen above also that decisions made by a small group may be better decisions than those made a single individual, and we have noted that a parallel situation may be true for a mind made up of many subselves rather than a single unified self. Lester argued, therefore, that a multiple self may fit the concept of economic man better than a unified self.

Future Subselves

Postulate 6 Individuals can seek to create new subselves for the future.

People can seek to create new subselves as defined in the present theory. For example, with regard to roles (one possible form of subselves), an individual might plan to have

a child and become a parent, thereby creating a new role. When depressed people enter therapy of some kind to change their lives, their behavior can be construed as seeking to create a new happy subself for the future. In this last example, the reality is that the depressed subself will not disappear or be destroyed, but rather that it will take over the mind for less and less time in the future, in the way that Angyal (1965) proposed that the biopositive system principle organizes the mind for longer periods of time as patients progress through therapy, while the bionegative system principle organizes the mind less often.

Do Subselves Come in Pairs?

Postulate 7 The subselves in some individuals are complemented by subselves differing on critical dimensions.

Boulding (1968), in writing about the subsystems of society, noted that each system tends to create the need for an opposing system that balances it, and that typically these two subsystems share similar characteristics. A forceful pro-choice movement for abortion leads to the development of a forceful pro-life anti-abortion movement, and vice versa.

Lester (1993–1994) noted that this might occur in subselves. Jung (Proffoff 1973) felt that each complex in the conscious mind was balanced by a complementary complex in the unconscious mind with opposed traits. For example, if the conscious complex is extraverted and prone to use intuition, then the unconscious complex will be introverted and prone to use sensing. Jung saw complexes and subcomplexes balanced in extraversion–introversion, thinking–feeling and sensing–intuition.

Freeing this idea from the polarity of conscious/unconscious, it can be proposed that any subself will tend to encourage the development of another subself with complementary characteristics. An example here is the description of the “top dog” and “bottom dog” by Perls et al. (1951) in their description of Gestalt therapy—the righteous, nagging, and threatening self versus the self that promises to change if only it could! These two subselves are similar to those described by Schelling (1980). One of Schelling’s examples in the subself that wants clean lungs and a long life and the other subself who adores tobacco. The underlying construct could rational–irrational, in which the irrational subself discounts the future.

Corollary 7a Some subselves may occur in pairs with complementary attributes, whereas other subselves may occur in pairs with similar attributes. It is an empirical question as to whether individuals have such pairs, the genesis of these pairs and why some complement each other while others do not.

Corollary 7b A common polarity in pairs of subselves is the top-dog/bottom dog dichotomy proposed in Gestalt therapy.

Integration

Postulate 8 The individual eventually tries to integrate the subselves.

If the mind is conceptualized as made up of several subselves, the issues arises as to how the mind might be integrated (Lester 1993–1994). It might be that the process of integration [seen by Jung (Progoff 1973) as the task of the second half of life] involves breaking down the boundaries between the subselves and integrating them into a single unified self. Alternatively, it might be that the different subselves are fully developed and coexist in harmony with one another as Berne (1961) and Shapiro and Elliott (1976) have suggested.

Corollary 8a The integration of subselves is a task for the second half of life.

This, of course, was proposed by Jung (Progoff 1973) and Erikson (1968).

Corollary 8b One form of integration is peaceful and harmonious co-existence, cooperation and collaboration between the subselves.

Corollary 8c One form of integration is the fusion or merging of the separate subselves into a single unified self.

Corollary 8d It is an empirical issue as to which individuals choose each path of integration and what determines this choice.

The Varieties of Subselves

Richards (1990) argued that the schemes for categorizing a person's subselves are unlimited. There may be no common set of labels, but rather individuals have their own set of labels. This is reminiscent of Kelly's (1955) Theory of Personal Constructs, in which there are no common constructs found in all people, but rather a unique set of constructs found in each individual.

However, other theorists have argued that the subselves of different people do have similar properties. For example, Berne (1961) proposed that every individual has three ego states: parent, adult and child. The contents of each person's child ego state, for example, may be different, but everyone has a child ego state of some kind.

There have been many proposals for the types of subselves that might exist. Some theorists have suggested that there is a core self (Kelly 1955) and what has been called a social self, pseudo-self, false self or, preferably, *façade self* (Laing 1969; Rogers 1959; Wagner 1971). It is perhaps not useful to single out only one of the subselves as a core self or to have only one façade self. It seems more reasonable to propose several subselves which are equivalent (though differing in their influence on behavior) as core subselves and several as façade selves, in much the same way as a person can have several roles.

Postulate 9 There are several possibilities for subselves that are common to all individuals.

Corollary 9a One common set of subselves consists of one or more core selves and one or more façade selves.

Corollary 9b Another common set of subselves is the top-dog/bottom-dog subselves proposed in Corollary 7a.

Corollary 9c There are probably regressive subselves in most, if not all, individuals which are the subselves that they had at an earlier stage in life.

Corollary 9d There are probably subselves formed by the introjection of the desires and thoughts of powerful others (in particular, parental figures) and imitation of their personality and behavioral styles.

Corollary 9e Subselves may be defined in terms of social group membership or personal attributes and, in some people, there may be mixed types.

Corollary 9f Kelly's repertory grid technique may be useful for describing and measuring the content of subselves.

The psychological content of the subselves (wishes, thoughts, and emotions) probably varies greatly from person to person. Therefore, a good way of exploring the contents of the subselves of an individual is by the use of an instrument such as Kelly's repertory grid (Kelly 1955). For example, Lester (1998) had students complete a repertory grid for eight of their college professors (using an eight-by-eight grid), and separately for eight of their family members, two of their major roles (and perhaps subselves). The repertory grids of the students for their professors were less complex than those for their family members (the first factor for the professors' grids accounted for more of the variance). The constructs identified for the professors were rated as more appropriate for the professors than for the family members and, *pari passu*, for the constructs identified for the family members. Thus, each subself may be ideally suited for the role it has and less useful if applied in other situations.

Subself Theory and Dissociation

Postulate 10 Some subselves may be in a dissociated state about which the other selves have delusional, minimal or no knowledge.

There are many phenomena which lend themselves to a subself explanation. Lester (2004) noted that phenomena such as multiple personality, possession, mediums who communicate with the dead via "spirit guides," reincarnation memories, and hallucinations can all be explained using the concept of subselves. For a fuller account of this explanation, see Lester (2004) who saw these phenomena as lying on a continuum of dissociation.

The dissociation hypothesis suggests research for the future. For example, Ring (1992) studied groups of individuals who reported near-death experiences and alien abductions and found that both groups had a high occurrence of childhood trauma and abuse and high scores on a measure of dissociative tendencies. Lester (2004) found no studies of those reporting reincarnation or possession experiences or on mediums along these lines. Such studies would be of great value.

Corollary 10a The concept of dissociated subelves can explain such phenomena as multiple personality, possession, mediumship, reincarnation and auditory hallucinations.

Psychological Disturbance

The theory of subelves proposed here leads to many types of psychological disturbance.

Postulate 11 There are many forms of psychological disturbance which can arise from the conceptualization of the mind as consisting of many subelves.

Corollary 11a Psychological disturbance can arise from symptoms of pressure, intrusion, and invasion between subelves.

This description of psychological disturbance was proposed most cogently by Angyal (1965). In symptoms of pressure, one subself tries to assume executive power while another subself is in control. This can result in mild symptoms such as insomnia, heightened anxiety, restlessness and fatigue. In symptoms of invasion (called *contamination*) by Berne, while one subself has executive power, other subelves affect occasional behaviors. The tone of voice or other nonverbal qualities of the behavior may be controlled by a suspended subself. Slips of the tongue, obsessive thoughts, hallucinations, and delusions are other manifestations of symptoms of intrusion. Jung considered neurosis to be the result of intrusions. In symptoms of invasion, subelves invade one another, and the behavior of the individual becomes chaotic as different behaviors are controlled by different subelves. It is a state of being at war with oneself, and Jung saw the psychoses as the manifestation of symptoms of invasion.

Corollary 11b Psychological disturbance can arise when one subself has executive power exclusively.

When one subself governs exclusively, the other subelves are deprived permanently of executive power, and this creates an imbalance amongst the subelves. The ideal situation is for each subself to be recognized, accepted, and permitted expression and to have executive power from time to time.

Corollary 11c Psychological disturbance can arise when the individual has difficulty setting and shifting set (changing which subself has executive power) appropriately in a situation.

A person may show a stubborn resistance to shifting subelves when a shift is warranted, as when the role that the individual is operating in changes (from worker to parent, for example), or when the individual shifts sets opportunistically and inappropriately (for example, when a psychotherapist commits a boundary violation and becomes sexually intimate with a client).

Corollary 11d Psychological disturbance can arise when the content of the subselves is pathological.

There may be psychopathology because the content of one or more subselves is pathological. A serial murderer may, for example, have several subselves with firm boundaries (and so no symptoms of intrusion or invasion) and be able to set and shift set appropriately, and yet may enjoy torturing and killing others. Berne (1961) gave the example of a happy concentration camp guard as illustrating this type of psychopathology. Angyal (1965) in his theory of personal proposed a bionegative system principle (consisting of the pattern of vicarious living and the pattern of noncommitment) which also are examples of content psychopathology.

Corollary 11e The healthiest individuals may have one subself that is in charge of the set of subselves.

Frick (1993) suggests that a superordinate subself, is required for healthy functioning—as some have phrased it (e.g., Schwartz 1995), someone to conduct the orchestra. There may also be a core subself that can and should assume leadership.

Corollary 11f Some subselves may cease to be useful as the individual matures and may need to become less influential in determining the individual's life.

Hermans (2002) discussed the case of “Nancy,” a client he treated, who decided that she no longer wanted a subself she named the “child” to determine her life. She worked with her therapist to develop another subself she named the “independent” figure which she introduced into her group of subselves so as to minimize the impact of the “child.”

Corollary 11g Subselves that may be unhelpful for some tasks and impair performance and development may be useful in other situations.

Excellent examples of this can be found in Berne's ego states in which each ego state (child, adult and parent) is appropriate in some situations.

Corollary 11h The possibility of attributing negatively valued aspects (thoughts, desires, emotions or behaviors) of oneself to one or more subselves may enable the individual to maintain high self-esteem since the negative aspects of one subself do not color the other subselves.

This corollary is based on the ideas proposed by Markus and Wurf (1987) in a discussion of self-schemas.

Developmental Considerations

There is a long tradition in psychology of viewing development as a progression from a state of relative undifferentiation to a state of greater differentiation and hierarchical integration (Wapner 1964), leading eventually, in the second half of life, to integration.

There are two major issues here. How are subselves formed and what determines whether they become part of the plural self (Yost et al. 1992).

Postulate 12 Subselves may be formed as a result of early experiences.

Many subselves are formed early in life, remain with us throughout life, become more or less salient over time, but also change (Ewing 1990). Subselves can be created by experience. Relevant formative processes include the processes described by psychoanalysis (with its emphasis on early experiences, especially traumatic experiences), the impact that the conditions of worth have on the development of a child's façade self as described by Rogers and Angyal (the pattern of vicarious living), and parents who are inconsistent as described by Angyal (the pattern of noncommitment). Firestone (1997) drew attention to "well-integrated patterns of negative thoughts (which he called "voices") which stem from the introjection of hostile parental attitudes toward the child which becomes accepted as part of the individual.

Postulate 13 Subselves may be formed by the encountering of possible subselves exemplified by other people.

Kelly (1955) in his theory of personal constructs introduced the concept of threat—the possibility of an imminent change in the individual's core constructs. Encountering someone who presents an alternative life style can be a threat—"I should behave as that person does." In some situations, other people act toward the individual as if he or she should behave in a certain way—and it is tempting to adopt that subself in order to cope with the situation.

Postulate 14 Subselves are selected to become more or less permanent members of the plural self depending on their usefulness in helping the individual succeed.

This success may be healthy (a humanistic perspective) or may help the individual persist in maladaptive behaviors (as in the view of Gestalt therapy which conceptualizes the goal in psychotherapy as learning how to become better at being neurotic).

Postulate 15 Individuals form fewer possible selves as they age. Aging narrows the possibilities for the individual as he or she moves toward completing their specific system principle.

Angyal saw individuals as eventually having too little time left in their lives for changing their specific system principle and, as a consequence, they have less freedom of choice.

Subselves and Psychotherapy

Postulate 16 The concept of subselves is useful for psychotherapy and counseling.

The hypothetical existence of subselves has a long history or use in psychotherapy. Transactional analysis (Berne 1961) is based on the existence of ego states. Trans-

actional analysis begins with a structural analysis in which the clients are introduced to the concept of ego states and helped to identify which ego state they are in at any time. Intrusions (called contamination in transactional analysis) are identified and eliminated. Psychotherapy then moves to a transactional analysis, in which transactions are examined for such issues as whether they are complementary or crossed and overt or covert (as in “games”). Goulding and Goulding (1979) have proposed their own system which also uses ego states, called redecision therapy. Other psychotherapists who use subselves (or similar concepts) include Schwartz (1995), Shapiro and Elliott (1976), and Firestone (1997).

Corollary 16a One useful tactic in psychotherapy is to have the client identify and provide names for their subselves.

Naming the subselves helps clients recognize, explore, describe, discuss and understand these aspects of themselves.

Corollary 16b Some subselves are more useful in the psychotherapeutic process than others.

The usefulness of particular subselves at particular stages of the psychotherapeutic process is illustrated by crisis intervention. Orton (1974) suggested that, in dealing with a client in crisis, it is helpful to get the client’s adult ego state (in transactional analysis terminology) in control. If the crisis counselor speaks from a parent ego state, this will encourage the client to let the child ego state take over as executive and increase the feelings of helplessness. Asking nonthreatening questions designed to elicit information facilitates the client’s adult ego state assuming executive power and calming the client down.

Corollary 16c It is important in psychotherapy to know the relationships among a client’s network of subselves, that is, the alliances and coalitions that exist and how they change from time to time and situation to situations.

Corollary 16d Some subselves may become enmeshed, and the psychotherapist must help the client create sufficiently impermeable boundaries. Alternatively, some subselves may become disengaged, and the task then is to recognize them and encourage them to express themselves.

Corollaries 16c and 16d come from ideas common in family therapy (e.g., Minuchin 1974), in particular, families in which each family member is far too involved in the personal concerns of the other family members, and families in which coalitions form as the members take sides in family disputes.

Subself Theory and Constructivist Psychology

As Raskin (2005) has noted, “constructivist psychologies theorize about and investigate how human beings create systems for meaningfully understanding their

worlds and experiences” (p. 1). Subself theory provides a schema by which individuals can create a system for understanding their experience of themselves. Whereas some earlier theorists, such as Berne and Jung proposed subselves that each of us has, such as the child, adult, and parent ego states or the persona, shadow and animus/anima, the theory proposed here makes it clear that the whether or not the concept of subselves describes the mind of the individual is up to the individual (Postulate 1). The notion of a multiple self may not make sense for everyone. Furthermore, the theory permits individuals for whom the concept of subselves makes sense to decide what names and which properties to give their subselves. True, therapists may use the notion of a multiple self to decide that a client may need to create new subselves (c.f., Shapiro and Elliott 1976), but this is possible only if the therapist’s suggestion makes sense to the client.

In many ways, this theory is analogous to Kelly’s theory of personal constructs. There are no particular constructs that all individuals share in common, and Kelly devised the repertory grid test in order to ascertain the constructs that each individual employs in construing the worlds. Since, in the present theory, there are no subselves that all individuals have in common, it is the task of each individual to decide which subselves he or she has, and Corollary 9f suggested that a modification of the repertory grid test may be used to explore the characteristics of each subself. Subself theory, therefore, provides a framework for individuals to create a system to explain their own experience (their experience of their “self”).

Discussion

Ewing (1990) has argued that the notion that individuals have a unified, whole self, is an illusion, particularly strong in the Western world. As Geertz (1984) has said:

The Western conception of the person as bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment, and action organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively both against other such wholes and against its social and natural background, is however incorrigible it may seem to us, a rather peculiar idea within the context of the world’s cultures (p. 126).

This illusion of wholeness is created by defense mechanisms, the psychological processes of condensation, displacement, transference and identification, which “create an illusory sense of wholeness and personal continuity out of what are actually inconsistent self-experiences (Ewing 1990, p. 266). In contrast, cultural anthropologists, making what psychologists would call clinical observations of indigenous peoples in their natural settings, are aware of the varieties of subselves that appear in different contexts, or social settings.

Despite this, Baumeister (1998) stated: “The multiplicity of selfhood is a metaphor. The unity of selfhood is a defining fact” (p. 682). Since Baumeister present no facts to back up his assertion, it could just as appropriately be asserted that the unity of the self is a metaphor while the multiplicity of the self is a fact. In contrast, Postulate 1 of the present theory has granted that some people have a single self while others have a multiple self. It is not crucial, but it is of some importance,

that psychological theories match people's experience. Although the present author is convinced of his continued existence as a single individual, he is also quite sure that he has different, subjectively experienced subselves.

There are many sources from which additional propositions and corollaries about subselves might be identified. Role theory provides such concepts as a role set (a collection of roles), formal and informal roles (such as "professor" and "scapegoat" in the family system), role conflict and role strain (Merton 1968), role distance in which the individual resists the role and purposely gives inauthentic performances (Goffman 1961) and role merger, that is, the degree to which individuals see themselves as defined primarily through one of the roles they play (Turner 1978). It may be important, however, to clarify the distinctions between (or relationships among) the concepts of subselves, identities [especially as defined by Deaux (1991)²] and roles. Other sources of propositions and corollaries may come from analogies with group dynamics and family therapy. It is hoped that this first formal presentation of a subself theory of personality will stimulate analysis and development of the theory.

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² "membership in recognizable social group... personal characteristics ...[and] attributes of personality shared with a large number of other people" (Deaux 1991, p. 78). Examples are professor, spouse, friend, woman, Roman Catholic, Hispanic, among others.

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